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Religion and Public Life in the Midwest: America's Common Denominator?

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correctness" stifling open exchange. Frank questions the narrative of Vietnam veterans "being victimized by betrayal, first by liberals in government and then by the antiwar movement, as symbolized by the clueless [Jane] Fonda" and is skeptical of the impact of the "Vietnam syndrome." He also makes sport of conservatives in the middle of the country for worrying about "plans for depopulating the Great Plains so that it can be turned into a gigantic national park." The problem for Frank's argument, however, is that for each of these claims—the Hollywood-Democratic Party axis, the tendency of liberals to dominate political reporting, the continuing ability of Vietnam experience to paralyze liberal foreign policy makers—there is a deep well of supporting evidence. Despite his dismissal, it is also true that liberal professors (urban planners, no less) have advanced (to great acclaim) a plan (which he does not mention) to return the Plains to the buffalo. Frank does not provide historical evidence that the assorted claims of the "great backlash" are untrue. He assumes they are.

Religion and Public Life in the Midwest: America's Common Denominator? edited by Philip Barlow and Mark Silk. Religion by Region Series. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004. 254 pp. Charts, maps, appendix, index. \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer Bill Douglas is a delivery worker in Des Moines. The author of articles in the *Annals of Iowa* and *Minnesota History*, he is collecting materials on the religious history of Iowa.

The Religion by Region Series seems to have been spawned by maps, particularly Philip Barlow and Edwin Gaustad's indispensable *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (2001). The editors define the Midwest as the Great Plains states east to Ohio, except Missouri. Although they do not explain why Missouri, politically and culturally midwestern, is included in the Southern Crossroads region (and occasionally the chapter authors stray in referring to the cities there as midwestern), a glance at Barlow and Gaustad's map, "Denominational Predominance [By County]," does argue for Missouri's inclusion as part of the solidly Baptist South, a Baptist predominance that ends miraculously right at the Iowa border.

To their credit, editors Philip Barlow and Mark Silk have assembled not just first-rate scholars, but chapter authors who all live in the region, such as Mark Noll of Wheaton College, the eminent authority on American evangelicalism; L. DeAne Lagerquist of St. Olaf College, who has written a very useful history of American Lutheranism for the Denominations in America series; and Jay Dolan of Notre Dame,

whose books on American Catholicism have set the bar for future work. But a closer look at the authors' residences shows that only one lives west of the Mississippi, and Wisconsin, Michigan, and downstate Illinois are also unrepresented. This is only partially mitigated by Barlow's and Cantonwine's case studies of South Dakota, Kansas, and Michigan in the introductory chapter.

Such intraregional parochialism accounts for the imprecision of some of its generalisms. When, for example, Peter Williams cites the heritage of economic populism in Minnesota and Wisconsin, certainly North Dakota should be included on that list, and even—if Thomas Frank is correct—in a perverse way Kansas. Most Iowans would be surprised by the claim that they are "cultural soulmates more with eastern Montana . . . than . . . eastern Ohio" (228).

The book seems on most solid ground when it deals with specifics. Raymond Brady Williams's "Religion and Recent Immigrants" is the most tightly argued essay, though I did not get a sense of what is distinctively midwestern in the recent immigrants' contacts. My favorite chapter was a descriptive tour of Chicago religion by Elfriede Wedem and Lowell Livezey, although they could have cited Elizabeth Johnson's photo essay, *Chicago Churches*, for visual accompaniment. On the important but tricky topic of religion and place, Rhys Williams might have been better served by taking a topographical approach (as did Belden Lane, Dorothee Kocks, and Richard Francaviglia) than one based on population density ("urban, suburban, rural").

Many of the chapters are readable and informative without providing anything new. The introductory chapter seems a textual adaptation of the *Historical Atlas*, and both Noll's theme of "an enduring Methodist tinge" and Lagerquist's description of Lutheran dominance in the upper Midwest can be map-read. Dolan's chapter on the German-progressive nature of midwestern Catholicism reprises his other work.

Iowa references to Billy Sunday, Grant Wood, and "quirky" Iowa caucuses border on stereotyping the state. Lagerquist does have a useful reference to Lutheran Social Service of Iowa. The early and continuing importance of Cedar Rapids as a Muslim center is mentioned (139, 153, 227), but Cedar Rapids does not appear in the index.

Because of the scattered nature of a collection of essays, many important works on the Midwest are left unmentioned. I will resist the temptation to invoke more than one: Jon Gjerde's *Minds of the West*, which masterfully traces the evolution of immigrant thought and cultural diversity and would reinforce the thrust of the essays. Slowly yet surely, with varying results as to quality, a literature of state religious history is being built. The book's lack of attention to this genre sug-

gests an attempt to build from the top down. Still, finally we have a start, a book on midwestern religion. If this relatively slim volume contrasts with the mountain of books on religion in the South, including an encyclopedia and a brand new book of essays, it ought to serve as a spur to more efforts. Yet somehow, the book seems less than the sum of its parts; perhaps the same could be said of the region.

Public History and the Environment, edited by Martin V. Melosi and Philip Scarpino. Public History Series. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 2004. xiv, 291 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$38.50 cloth.

Reviewer Tom Woods is president of Making Sense of Place, Inc., a public history consulting firm. He is the author of a book on the Grange, and his articles include "Nature within History: Using Environmental History to Interpret Historic Sites" (*History News*, 1997).

Public History and the Environment is a valuable orientation to the broad field of environmental history and its intersections with public history. Fifteen essays explore public historians' role in understanding the history of environmental policy, in ferreting out the influence of class and race in environmental policy making, in understanding changing attitudes toward landscapes, as expert witnesses in environmental litigation, as researchers untangling the history of endangered species, as advocates in grassroots environmentalism, and as specialists who help museums develop environmental history exhibits. Some essays are provocative, encouraging new perspectives or providing useful approaches to old problems.

The introduction sets the stage for the articles that follow. It defines the academic field of environmental history as a field of study that treats "the relationship between humans and their physical environment over time" (viii). Unlike environmental history, public history is not a field of study. Instead, it is a method of practicing history that combines the research, analysis, interpretation, and communication techniques common to all good history. Unlike traditional academic history, its products are generally directed to public audiences or for public impact, rather than to a small group of academic peers or to fulfill a professor's individual research interests. Good public history is history done with the public, for the public, and in public. Public historians hope to illuminate environmental history by involving people in "a conversation about the creation of place over time, the meaning of place in the present, and interaction with place in the future" (ix).

Coeditor Philip Scarpino's essay, "The Creation of Place over Time: Interpreting Environmental Themes in Exhibit Format," is one of the

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